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# Committee on Labor and Agriculture Senator Dave Hansen, Chair

### PAPER BALLOT

Date:

November 1, 2001

Bill:

Senate Bill 303 -- Relating to: a temporary emergency unemployment

insurance program and requiring the exercise of rule-making authority.

Motion:

**Passage** 

Moved by: Hansen

Seconded by: Baumgart

Please return to Senator Hansen's office (by messenger) by 5:00 Thursday, November 1, 2001.

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November 1st, 2001

### State Senator Bob Jauch

Testimony before the Senate Committee on Labor and Agriculture on SB 303

Creation of the Temporary Emergency Unemployment Compensation Plan

Thank you Chairman Hanson, and members of the committee for allowing me the opportunity to provide my testimony this afternoon.

I regret I am unable to attend the hearing today to testify on behalf of Senate Bill 303, which will extend unemployment compensation benefits to Wisconsin unemployed workers. Unfortunately, I must be in Superior for an emergency meeting of a local task force to respond to a plant closure resulting in the elimination of 115 jobs.

With the current weakening economy and turmoil created by the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, workers in the state of Wisconsin and around the nation are more frequently finding themselves without employment.

The number of people applying for first time unemployment benefits in Wisconsin jumped by over 4,000 in the last four weeks. There were 6,100 fewer manufacturing jobs in Wisconsin in September than in August. A quick glance of recent newspaper headlines tells the grim tale: 140 layoffs at Tower Automotive in Milwaukee. Rich Products Appleton Plant to close, 315 lose jobs. Five state companies alert Wisconsin that layoffs may be coming. 115 jobs lost in Superior and another 180 jobs to be shipped to Mexico from Janesville. All without mentioning the approximately 1,000 state jobs lost due to layoffs at Northwest, Midwest Express and Skyway Express airlines.

It is therefore imperative that the State of Wisconsin act now to assist the quickly growing ranks of new jobless in this state.

Unemployment compensation is the first line of defense to workers and their families when faced with the financial hardship of unemployment. These are hard working citizens who would rather work but are laid off through no fault of their own. In recent years, a healthy economy and worker shortage provided opportunities for the unemployed. But in today's economic climate, their options are limited.

We have a moral obligation as well as an economic interest to helping these families, buy their groceries, pay their mortgages, their heating bills, insurance, car payments and in some cases tuition. We must offer them economic support to help them through the difficult times until the economy improves and they find jobs.

This legislation will provide critical assistance to the unemployed and their families by creation of a procedure to extend unemployment benefits. If the Congress enacts Federal legislation to extend benefits, this proposal directs the Department of Workforce Development to use administrative rules to implement the improvements. If Congress fails to act, the bill directs the Unemployment Insurance Advisory Council to recommend a State extended benefits program to the Legislature for consideration by the end of January.

This legislation is significant because it commits Wisconsin to extending unemployment benefits to workers. Wisconsin has a long history of supporting our workers in times of economic distress, now is the time to take action again.

As you are aware, last week I wrote the members of the advisory council to seek their urgent attention to the need for extending benefits. This legislation was drafted with the cooperation of both business and labor leaders on the Council and I am hopeful the entire council will endorse the bill in the very near future. Members of the committee, as you are aware, because of the business/labor makeup of the Council, as well as the integrity with which they have operated in the past, any recommendation made by the Council usually garners approval by the legislature.

I hope that this time will be no different. The Department of Workforce Development tells us that so far this year there are 48% more unemployment claims now then there were at the same time a year ago. It is conceivable that as many as 80,000 workers may be in need of extended benefits.

Under current law, unemployment benefits are automatically extended when unemployment reaches a certain level of insured unemployment. Currently we are 2.5% below that level. The State will have to face severe economic collapse for that trigger to take effect.

We shouldn't wait until this picture becomes even bleaker for the unemployed. It is absolutely necessary that the State of Wisconsin provide compassioned leadership by ensuring that laid-off workers in Wisconsin will receive some measure of economic support until the economy recovers and they become employed again.

While the need to help our states workers and their families is great, let me summarize the basic reasons for this proposal.

**First**, We have the means to do it. Our reserve balance is healthy and strong at \$1.7 billion. If Congress enacts an unemployment compensation plan, the Federal Government will provide Wisconsin with additional resources. If the Congress fails to act, and the State extends the benefits, a healthy and prudent balance in the Unemployment Compensation fund will be maintained.

**Second**, while there has been a great deal of attention paid to the plight of industries that have suffered as a result of the slowdown and the fallout from the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, not enough effort has been made on behalf of the workers being laid off by those corporations. In Washington and in Madison, too much of the debate has centered only on the need to provide corporate assistance. Now is the time to show that the State of Wisconsin has an equal level of concern for working men and women who have lost jobs through no fault of their own. We simply cannot take a one-sided view of restoring our nation's economy.

**Third**, there is a great concern that many of those who have been laid off, or will be laid off in the near future, won't get called back to work any time soon. The new jobless claims in the state indicate that this isn't a temporary or short-term dip in the economy, but may represent a permanent downsizing of the job market.

**Fourth**, Wisconsin needs to take a lead on this issue, and send a positive pro-worker message that will set an example, and perhaps create the momentum for similar action in Washington.

**Finally**, I am still hopeful that our elected officials in Washington will provide a plan to assist those who have lost their means of economic support. However, nothing is a certainty. The bottom line is that workers in Wisconsin are in desperate need of Government help in the form of extended unemployment compensation. And this bill ensures that regardless of Congressional action, they will receive that assistance, either from the state or federal government.

For that reason, I urge to you vote in favor of passage of Senate Bill 303.

Thank you.